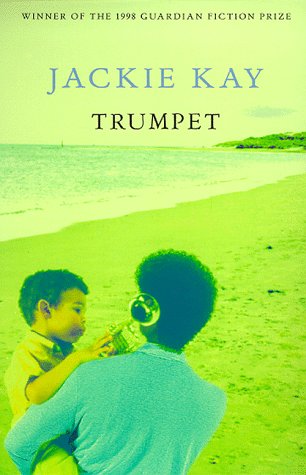
**Annotated Text Set –Brianna Greaves**

**Gender on the Margins**

Students are increasingly exposed to ideas around gender and stereotypes, and how they should be free from confining and rigid gender roles, but there is not often space given to the actual experience of having one’s gender be so non-conforming that it could be said to be existing ‘on the margins’. In this text set, students will be exposed to the realities, complexities and struggles of the ‘gender outlaws’, or people who struggle and fight for a sense of cohesive identity while occupying space in the frontier of gender, a space that can and often does provoke a fear response from individuals accustomed to – and invested in – hegemonic gender norms. The very existence of those on the outside threatens the foundations of gender and what we have been taught to believe about its inherent and ‘natural’ connection to particular bodies.

This text set will provide students with the opportunity to interrogate their own gender in ways that will encourage them to understand how their performances of normative modes of gender, as well as their more ‘transgressive’ expressions of gender allows them access into, or exclusion from, positions of relative power in their communities. Through this deep and intensive study of gender identities, students will develop and hone analytical skills that can be extended to other insidious forms of oppression, such as racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and ableism, among others.

1. **Trumpet by Jackie Kay**



Summary

This fictional story (based loosely on the real-life trumpeter, Billy Tipton) centers on the search for the ‘true’ identity of a famous jazz trumpeter, Joss Moody. The story is told through the multiple perspectives of the people who knew and loved him in his life, and who are shocked to discover upon his death that he was actually a woman. The story centers on his adopted son, who struggles with feelings of betrayal and confusion about the gender identity of his father, and what his new revelation means to his conception of his father and his past.

Rationale

This novel raises important questions about what it means to ‘lie’ about your sex. The main character feels betrayed by his father’s keeping his biological sex secret from him all his life. This tension would provide a useful starting point for discussion with students on the true meaning of biological sex and gender: what is their respective importance, and how do they interact with one another? How are they communicated? What happens when someone changes the ‘script’ of gender and biological sex? A major theme of the book is the concept of ‘truth’ and ‘lies’. Students will work with the question: was Joss Moody’s life a lie? Was his gender a lie? What was the truth of Joss Moody’s identity? Was his body the truth, or was his gender performance the truth? Was the anger of his son justifiable?

1. ***XXY* –Film written/directed by Lucia Puenzo**



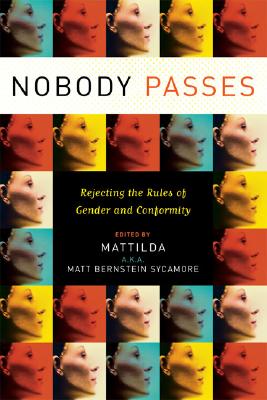
Summary

This Argentine film tells the story of a 15-year-old intersex person whose coming-of-age and sexual awakening brings with it complicated questions about how to deal with a paradoxical body and complex gender identity. The main character struggles with the seemingly impossible decision to “choose” whether to grow into a man or a woman, or to find a way to be both. The latter proves to be the best choice for our protagonist, despite being the most difficult for others to accept.

Rationale

The film explores the struggles and possibilities that exist between gender performance, sexual desire, and the physical body. It allows the viewer a glimpse into the overt and dramatic as well as the more subtle and insidious struggles of having one’s gender and sex so undefined and undefinable. XXY would provide a useful starting point for discussions around what it means when one’s physical body, not just one’s gender identity, is paradoxical and complex. The protagonist is also approximately the same age as the students who will be watching the film, which would likely allow the experience of the protagonist to have a deeper resonance with students.

1. **Nobody Passes: Rejecting the Rules of Gender and Conformity, Edited by Mattilda AKA Matt Bernstein Sycamore**



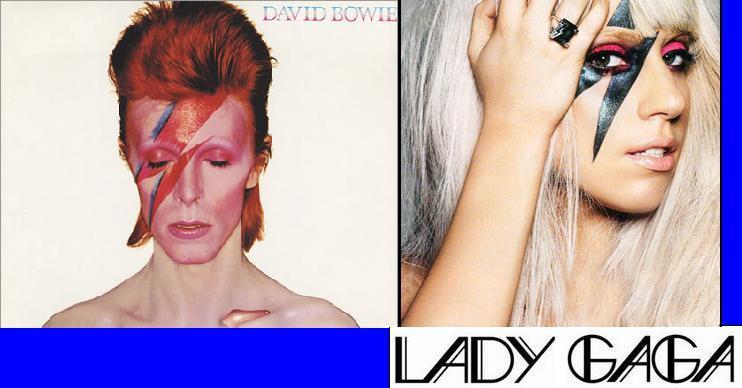
Summary

This collection of essays explores what it means to strive towards ‘passing’ as your preferred gender, even when your body and history can tell a different story. The collection is focused on what it means to ‘belong,’ challenging the very idea of belonging in a world that insists on conformity. The anthology sets out to ask the question, “What lies are people forced to tell in order to gain acceptance as 'real'?”

Rationale

There is an important tension inherent in ‘passing’ that arises from the need to counterbalance the story that one’s body tells with the story of one’s gender. This balancing act leads people to a place where they have to carefully construct their gender in such a way that involves a certain amount of erasure and denial, of the contradictory parts of their gender identity (the ones that ‘match’ with their physical body, for instance). This collection of essays explores these more subtle tensions, and will help students go deeper into their inquiry into ‘gender on the margins’ to explore the tensions between the way one sees oneself, and the way one must act (perform) in order to communicate a cohesive gender identity in spite of its often complicated interactions with the physical body.

1. **Images of David Bowie**



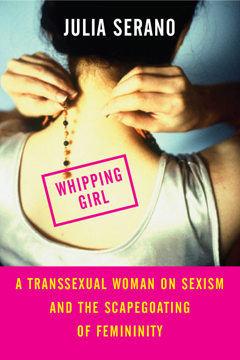
Summary

The first two images, placed side-by-side, show how a signature makeup design widely familiar to a large mainstream audience through Lady Gaga is actually a nod to 1970s and 80s glam rock star David Bowie. The third image features Bowie onstage in a patterned asymmetrical and skin-tight bodysuit, looking distinctly feminine in a provocative and balletic body position.

Rationale

The image of Lady Gaga, wearing makeup that references David Bowie, can be used as an entry point for students to emphasize for them the cultural importance of David Bowie, his music and his persona/image. These images provide a focal point for a discussion of gender, identity and performance. Why would someone like David Bowie be able to dress like this? Is it because he is a musical artist and performer? What effect, if any, does Bowie’s transgressive performance of gender have on the choices available to men in general?

1. **Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity by Julia Serano**



Summary:

In this book, lesbian transsexual activist and biologist Julia Serano presents a series of essays that draw out the connections between sexism and discrimination against transgender people. Her essays combine personal experiences and social perspectives with biological, social, psychological and historical research to reveal the ways in which fear and dismissiveness towards femininity have shaped societal attitudes towards trans women specifically, but also gender and sexuality in general.

Rationale:

This book will help students to more clearly understand the strong connection between sexism and discrimination against gender-non-conforming people. The ideas presented in the essays will help students gain an understanding of how sexism operates to systematically devaluate women and femininity in general, and how these systems are one of the root causes of discrimination against, and hatred towards, trans women as well as men who simply display characteristics that are considered to be ‘feminine’.

1. **News Article: Shawn Syms, “Policing Caster Semenya’s gender” Tuesday, August 25 2009. *Xtra: Canada’s Gay and Lesbian News.***



Summary:

This article describes, and provides commentary on, the controversy surrounding South African gold-medal winning athlete Caster Semenya, whose masculine characteristics caused opponents to question her biological sex and its potential impact on her athletic performance. It became international news, as commentators around the globe weighed in, leading to an official investigation into her sex, involving endocrinologists, geneticists and other medical professionals.

Rationale:

This article provides a starting point to a discussion on the policing of gender and sex through a somewhat extreme example of what happens when an athlete displays unconventional physical characteristics for their assumed sex. The controversy, and the intervention and invoking of biological science as the purveyors of ‘truth’ raise questions about what kinds of knowledge and understandings are viewed as legitimate in society. It shows us the tensions that can exist between science, personal history and self-identity in any body, regardless of whether or not it has as much complexity as the body of Semenya. This article would especially engage students who are interested in sport, and/or science

1. ***Pariah* – Film, by dee rees**

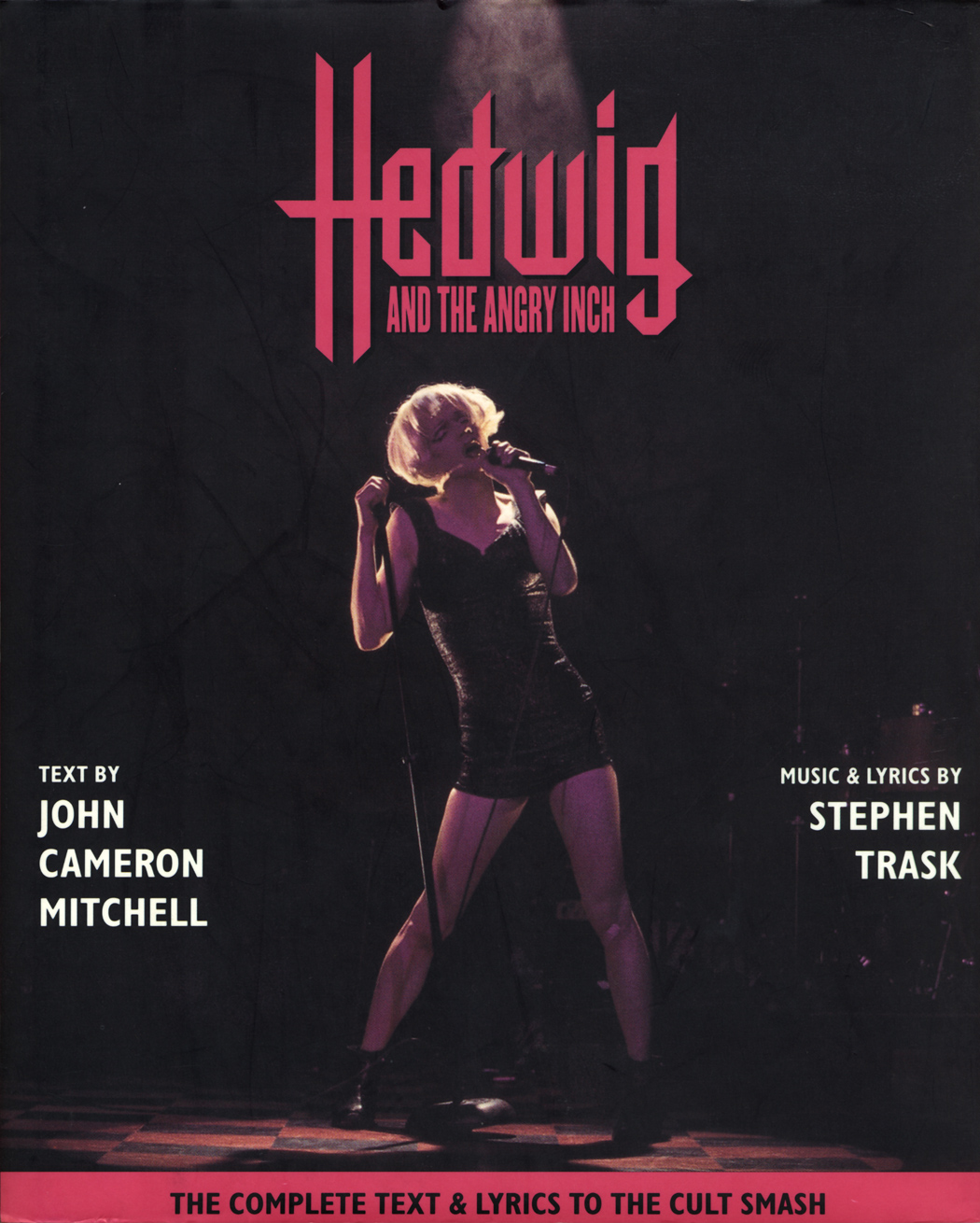


Summary:

The film, set in Brooklyn, centers on a teen who struggles to find a sense of her individuality and coherent identity. She faces strong opposition from family, friends and her community. Alike (Lee) struggles to have her burgeoning sexual identity recognized by her family as it comes into conflict with her mother’s religious views. She finds herself growing apart from her best friend Laura as she identifies more and more with a (lesbian and gender non-conforming) social circle outside of popular African-American culture. The film chronicles Alike’s struggles as she fights to remain true to herself even when it conflicts (sometimes violently) with her family and society.

The characters in Pariah are, in the words of Mecca Jamilah Sullivan of *The Feminist Wire*, “real, black characters in fraught, complex relationships – something we haven’t seen on mainstream screens in a long time.” The characters in this film are located all across the gender and sexuality spectrum, as well as representing a diversity of socioeconomic backgrounds and family structures. The film is often described as a ‘coming-of-age’ story, but to be more accurate it is a story of ‘self-making’, and urban black lesbian self-making, in particular. The main character’s best friend serves as a symbol of what the actor terms the “grand swagger of hip-hop masculinity”, and of black queer women’s self-made communities and black lesbian self-making. This story will provide students with an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding

1. **Hedwig and the Angry Inch – Play by John Cameron Mitchell**



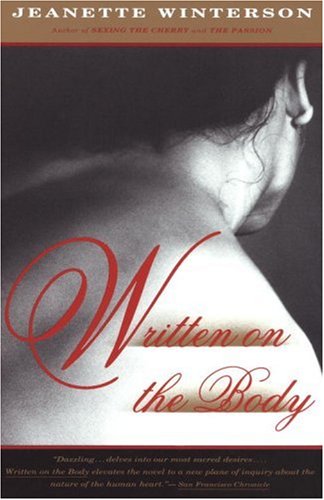
Summary

Hedwig and the Angry Inch is a rock musical that centers on Hedwig, the East-German transgender front woman of a largely unknown and underappreciated band. Through a collage of songs, flashbacks, and monologue-style narration, Hedwig tells her life story, which begins with her undergoing a botched sex-change surgery to marry an American soldier in order to escape communist East Germany to the capitalist West. It follows Hedwig’s journey of searching for love and a coherent sense of identity through songs played to bewildered audiences in dive bars and restaurants across the American Midwest.

Rationale

This play, besides being engaging in its campiness and quick-witted hilarity, explores issues of gender, identity and belonging in complex ways. It also represents a fully realized example of one important part of queer culture, which is ‘camp’ and performance. Students will explore the ways in which these interact with gender performance, and how they are often an integral means by which those whose very existence transgresses gender norms not only survive, but thrive. The play also contains intertextual references to Roman mythology that deepen as well as broaden the meaning and understandings students can gain from working with this text.

1. **Written on the Body by Jeanette Winterson**



Summary:

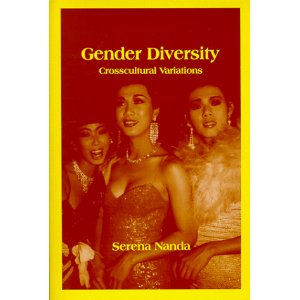
“*Written on the body is a secret code only visible in certain lights: the accumulations of a lifetime gather there. In places the palimpsest is so heavily worked that the letters feel like Braille. I like to keep my body rolled up away from prying eyes, never unfold too much, or tell the whole story. I didn't know that Louise would have reading hands. She has translated me into her own book.”*

This novel is a story of love found, lost, and (maybe) found again. The narrator falls for a married woman named Louise, who leaves her husband. When Louise finds she has cancer, she leaves her new lover (the narrator) too. Written on the Body is about self-discovery and the complexities of love, through the metaphors of desire and disease.

Rationale:

Winterson’s novel is a ‘post-marital’ meditation on love, desire and relationships with one big twist: the gender of the narrator is never revealed; we never know if it is a man or a woman. The story follows the narrator through love and loss in ways that turn the ‘romance’ genre on its head. Winterson reveals, and at the same time undoes, our expectations and assumptions about women and men and their relationship to romance and sex. The main love interest in the book, Louise, calls the narrator “the most beautiful creature male or female that I have ever seen” and at another point, the narrator observes, “I thought difference was rated to be the largest part of sexual attraction but there are so many things about us that are the same.” Winterson expertly manipulates genre as well as she does gender: roomy first-person narration sometimes addresses the reader, while at other times addressing the lover, meditating on extracts from an anatomy textbook, or providing brilliant and quirky commentary on science, virtual reality and the art of fiction.

1. **Gender Diversity: Crosscultural Variations by Serena Nanda**



Description:

This book provides a general and introductory glimpse into the different ways in which sex and gender diversity interacts with culture around the globe. It provides examples of ‘gender on the margins’ in seven different cultures, from an anthropological perspective. The book reveals the diversity and complexity of social responses toward sex and gender diversity .

Rationale:

The goal of Gender Diversity is to “raise our consciousness about the cultural construction of sex, gender and sexualities and their relationship to each other in all cultures”(Nanda, p.9). In doing so, “we are enabled to cross the barriers of cultural difference to a recognition of a greater shared humanity” (p.9). The examples will be eye-opening for students, and raise their awareness and challenge their attitudes about what we consider natural, normal and morally right. This text is also important as it reminds students that despite the dominance of discourses around gender transgression that centre white, middle-class, Western and/or North American identities, marginalized genders exist in many different cultural contexts, and their dynamics play out in a diversity of ways.